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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the vocational interests and personality patterns of today's academic librarians are more like the traditional stereotype (i.e., that librarians are conventional, conservative, rigid types) or are beginning to change due to the changing nature of the profession and its work environment. To determine the impact of these changes, the personality patterns and vocational interests of academic, database, and systems librarians were compared to those who comprise the professional norm. The norm consisted of public school, special, and college librarians in the same proportion as in the general population of Michigan librarians. A total of 380 Michigan librarians were mailed the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) Form T325 and a fact sheet for demographic data from which 213 useable responses were received. Analysis of variance and T-tests were performed to test for differences on the SII scales between the professional norm and the three librarian samples. Unlike earlier studies, this study indicated that today's librarians are dominant on the artistic theme. There were no statistically significant differences in vocational interests or personality patterns between today's academic librarians and the occupational norm for librarians in general, nor between academic librarians and those working in technological environments of any type. (Contains 14 references.) (KRN)

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LIBRARIANS' OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPE: WILL IT EVER CHANGE?

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate whether there were any personality differences between academic librarians and the members of the general occupation of librarians, often stereotyped by society as conventional and conservative. **All librarians groups tested were dominant** on Holland's **Artistic type and not on the Conventional type**, as depicted in several earlier studies. Nor were there statistically significant differences in vocational interests or personality patterns between academic librarians and those who worked in technological environments, such as the Database and Systems librarians from all types of libraries.

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LIBRARIANS' OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPE: WILL IT EVER CHANGE?

For more than a century, librarians have struggled to overcome the unpopular image of the occupational stereotype of the librarian, created by society and further augmented by the mass media. In 1971 an American Motors Company ad, depicting a negative stereotypical image of the female librarian, so incensed the profession that its action made representatives from the automobile company publish a public apology to the profession.[1] Currently, American Libraries features a regular column, "IMAGE: How They're Seeing Us," in which readers send in references from the media.[2] Sometimes the references are actually complimentary but often they reflect society's stereotypical image of the librarian.

YESTERDAY'S LIBRARIAN: THE STEREOTYPE!

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the librarian was caricatured as a bibliophile, a pale and undernourished man who lived only for his books.[3] In the post-war era, especially during the Depression, the profession began to be dominated by the single professional female, partially because of the war but also because men could no longer afford to raise a family on librarian wages. The twentieth century stereotype of the librarian has not changed over the decades:

> . . . unfailingly and eternally middle-aged, unmarried, and most uncommunicative. She exists to put a damper on all spontaneity, silencing the exuberance of the young with a harsh look or hiss. Her only task seems to be checking out books and collecting fines. Books to her are best left upon the library shelves where they do not become dirtied or worn . . . There at the desk she will stay, stamping out her books, until her retirement.[4]

This unflattering, stereotypical image of the librarian occupation held by the public has prompted serious research by librarians during the last few decades. Is it our personality type and our behavior that causes society and the media to think of us in those terms, or are those attracted to librarianship befitting of the stereotypical image?

A review of the literature on the personality patterns and vocational interests of librarians, and library school students clearly suggests that in general, librarians (academic librarians included) have been indeed conventional, conservative, rigid types, not dissimilar to the image associated with the stereotype.[5] Librarians as well as those preparing to enter the profession (library school students) tended to have similar personality traits. Many of the results of such studies were "consistent with normal personality profiles and congruent with the stereotypical image of librarians".[6]

TODAY'S LIBRARIAN: HAS THE STEREOTYPE CHANGED?

With the advance into the Information Age and the focus on information literacy, changing roles have been emerging for academic librarians. We must deal with information literacy as well as information technologies. Information literacy, "the ability to find, evaluate, and use information effectively in personal and professional lives,"[7] goes hand in hand with techno-literacy. This implies that academic librarians must be challenged rather than frustrated by the technological environment. As professionals we must enjoy being educators and researchers and as information providers we must continuously be a step ahead of those that need or seek that information. To be effective, we must constantly keep up with the changing technologies. The challenges brought about by the information revolution, coupled with the responsibilities inherent with faculty status, have changed the role of the academic librarian. Today the profession must attract and retain a new breed of academic librarians, librarians who have a somewhat different pattern of interests than those depicted by the stereotypical image of the occupation.

As electronic publishing gradually complements the printed media and electronic communication becomes the norm rather than the exception, librarians can no longer be protective of the information processes and sources, interpreting our jobs as keepers and protectors rather than suppliers and communicators.[8] The ability to access information from around the world through computers and telecommunication systems, as and when the need arises, is changing the whole idea of what constitutes a library.[9] Some question our readiness and ability to accept advanced technology,[10] suggesting that the occupational stereotype still exists: conventional, conservative and not very innovative.

THE PROBLEM

The primary purpose of this study was to find out whether the vocational interests and personality patterns of today's academic librarians were indeed more like the traditional stereotype or were we beginning to see a change, because of the changing nature of the profession and its work environment. The research questions postulated were as follows:

Is there a significant difference in personality patterns and vocational interests:

(1) Between **today's general population of librarians** (i.e. the professional norm) and those surveyed to form the occupational norm for the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) a few decades ago? (The SII measures vocational interests and relates it to occupational choices. It is based on the theory that "like" personality patterns and vocational interests are attracted to "like" occupations).

(2) Between **today's academic librarians** and a typical member of the library profession (the current occupational norm, consisting of all types of librarians)?

(3) Between **today's academic librarians** and those librarians working in a technological environments from any type of library (project managers of integrated online systems and librarians doing online database searches in public, college, school and special libraries)?

The study also compared **today's librarians** with men and women in general, on three variables: College Professor Occupational Scale, Academic Comfort Scale and Introversion-Extroversion Scale. The **College Professor** scale provides a comparison to the vocational interests and personality patterns of this occupational group. The **Academic Comfort Scale** measures the degree of comfort in being in an academic setting. The **Introversion-Extroversion Scale** reflects a person's interest in working with things or ideas versus working with people.

The theoretical underpinnings for this study are based on John Holland's theory of vocational choice. Holland's theory uses the Strong Interest Inventory to measure occupational interests and personality styles. According to Holland, people behave in accordance with the dominant characteristics of one of six major personality styles which influenced their choice of vocation.[11] His six categories of vocational interests with their related occupational themes are: **Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising** and **Conventional.** He explicitly recognizes the role of personality to be influenced largely by the "fit" between personality and work environment.

Research has indicated that Holland's theory can predict the kinds of vocational choices that people in the six personality categories would make.[12] Based on this theory and measured by the Strong Vocational Interest Inventory (SVII), there was a time when

Holland's Conventional Type used to be illustrated by librarians, accountants and secretaries.[13] However the up-dated 1985 edition of the Strong Interest Inventory, categorizes librarians as an occupational group, in the Artistic category.[14] Clearly, it the personality pattern of today's librarians has changed from that of yesteryear, despite the occupational stereotype that still exists! This study was undertaken to confirm that librarians belonged to Holland's **Artistic** category (and **not the Conventional group** as depicted in the stereotype), and to find out whether academic librarians were different from the professional norm.

THE STUDY

According to many psychologists and career and vocational choice experts, there appears to be evidence that personality traits (often measured by vocational interests) have a bearing on occupational behavior affecting choice of occupation and success.[15] Several of these studies match people's psychological, including vocational needs, values, attitudes, personality traits and styles with their choice of career and job satisfaction. For John Holland, "The choice of a vocation is an expression of personality"[16] and "Interest inventories are personality inventories."[17] He believed that "Vocational stereotypes have reliable and important psychological and sociological meanings."[18] Since members of an occupation hold similar self-concepts, they would theoretically share personality characteristics and traits.[19]

Based on this conceptual framework, an attempt was made to determine if academic librarians differed in personality patterns and vocational interests from those librarians working in technological environments or from the occupational norm. Was the academic library beginning to attract a different type of professional now that the computer had become an everyday tool of the occupation?

METHODOLOGY

The vocational interests and personality patterns of three groups of librarians, Academic, Database and Systems librarians, were compared to those who comprised the professional Norm. The norm consisted of public, school, special and college librarians in the same proportion as in the general population of Michigan librarians.

Three hundred and eighty (380) Michigan librarians were mailed the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) Form T325 and a fact sheet for demographic data. Two hundred and thirty two (61%) responded of which two hundred and thirteen (56%) were valid and usable. The average age was 44 and the average years of experience was 14. Those who did not have the graduate library degree of MLS or equivalent, returned incomplete ones or blank questionnaires were eliminated from the study. The data on the individual surveys were computer scored and analyzed by the Strong Interest Inventory professionals. Analysis of variance and T-tests were then performed to test for differences between the **professional norm** and the three librarian samples on the Strong Interest Inventory scales, including the Academic librarian sample.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study indicated that **none of the librarian groups tested were dominant on the Conventional type**, unlike those earlier studies on the personality of the librarian, or as most frequently depicted in stereotypical portrayals of the profession. Instead, results of the study confirmed the SII findings and indicated the following:

(1) That today's librarians were dominant on the Strong Interest Inventory's ARTISTIC theme indicating that most likely **a typical member of the profession "prefers artistic...situations... uses artistic competencies to solve problems...perceives self as expressive, original, intuitive, nonconforming, introspective, independent, disorderly...values aesthetic qualities."**[20] Other occupations in this category include authors, reporters, art teachers, artists, art museum directors etc. Typical work activities include composing, writing, creating art work and working independently. Potential competencies include creativity, verbal-linguistic skills, artistic aptitudes and musical abilities. People in this category prefer work environments that are unstructured, flexible organizations that allow self-expression, institutions that teach artistic skills such as universities, music and dance schools and art institutes, and enjoy working in museums, libraries and galleries. Their hobbies include reading, going to theaters and museums, writing.

Neither academic librarians nor the librarians in the

occupational sample were inclined to be the CONVENTIONAL type, i.e. like those who prefer well ordered environments and like systematic verbal and numerical activities, effective at well structured tasks, avoid ambiguous situations and problems evolving interpersonal relationships and who describe themselves as conscientous, efficient, obedient, calm, orderly and practical, even though this is how librarians were depicted in earlier studies and are freqently portrayed in the stereotype.

(2) That there were indeed no statistically significant differences in vocational interests or personality patterns between today's academic librarians and the occupational norm for librarians in general.

(3) That there were no statistically significant differences in vocational interests or personality patterns between academic librarians and those working in technological environments in any type of library.

(4) Librarians in the study were significantly different from "Men and Women in General" (i.e. the average person) when compared on the **College Professor** occupational scale. **Academic librarians** as well as the librarians in the **Norm group** were more like College professors than the average person on the street, even though, as a profession, librarians were dominant on the Artistic theme whereas the professorate was dominant on the Investigative theme. When the librarian sample groups in the study were compared with each other on this scale, the Database librarians' scores were closer to the professorial occupation than any of the other librarian group.

(5) When librarians were compared to people in general on the **Academic Comfort** scale there was no significant difference between the two, indicating that librarians, as a professional group, had an average level comfort score for working in an academic environment, just like the average person. They were not like college professors, who scored very high on this scale. Surprisingly, Academic librarians did not score significantly higher than any of the other sample librarian groups on this scale!

(6) Academic librarians as well as the Norm group were compared with people in general on the **Introversion-Extroversion** scale. The data showed that male and female Academic librarians as well as typical female librarians (as represented in the Norm group) tended to be more introverted than the average person, confirming findings from some earlier studies. The typical male librarian in the Norm group, however, was more like the average man, on this scale.

(7) Another test of significance that was performed was to see if there were differences in vocational interests and personality types between academic librarians with less than 14 years professional experience and those with 14 or more. Though there were no significant differences between the less experienced and the more experienced librarians in the Realistic, Investigative, and Artistic scales, there were indeed differences at the .05 level both on the ENTERPRISING and CONVENTIONAL scales. The less experienced college and university librarians were observed to be <u>less</u> "Enterprising" than their more experienced counterparts. However, they also tended to be less "Conventional" than their more experienced colleagues. It was interesting to note that no significant differences were observed on any of the scales, between the less experienced and more experienced librarians in the other three samples (Database, Systems and Norm librarians). In short, "Years of Experience" was a somewhat significant variable only for academic librarians and even that only on two of the six scales.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study indicated that (1) those who worked in academic library environments had the same vocational interests as those who worked in technological environments, such as Systems and Database librarians and that (2) Librarians as an occupational group were dominant on the ARTISTIC theme.

LIBRARIANS OF THE FUTURE: WILL THE STEREOTYPE EVER CHANGE?

Changing technologies have become so much an integral part of

academic and research libraries that the tools of the trade for academic librarians are more likely to be computers and databases than printed bibliographies and indexes. However, the intellectual work of creating information-based applications, including learning tools, structuring and organizing information and even knowledge, is what must become the primary focus of the information professional of the future.[21]

The occupational score for librarians, although dominant on the Artistic category, was by no means very high. This suggests that as the profession continues to evolve, academic librarians in particular may become, like their teaching colleagues, dominant on the Investigative theme, as more and more people are attracted to academic librarianship because of their "investigative" vocational interests.

Faculty librarians who intend to become partners with the teaching faculty in pursuit of excellence in higher education may have to change from being care-takers and providers of a support service within the educational process, to that of direct participants in that process. To achieve this it is likely that they must be attracted to the profession because of their interest in working in an intellectual environment while also having vocational interests that are creative, investigative and research oriented. As early users of the information technology, librarians in higher education, in particular, will have to be "part technician, part explorer, and part futurist."[22]

Academic librarianship, **can** no longer afford to attract the conventional, the conservative and the rigid. Research indicates that the profession is still evolving and that today's librarians are "artistic". Perhaps tomorrow's academic librarians will find themselves categorized as "investigative" and flexible, enjoying ambigous tasks, comfortable in the intellectual and technological environment of the profession, and confident of their own scholarly and intellectual abilities. Occupational stereotypes are slow to change but the emerging breed of academic librarians may indeed eventually change society's perception of the stereotype associated with the occupation!

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